

# **PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY NOTES**

## **Hams Fork Vegetation Restoration Project**

### **July 13, 2011**

**ATTENDEES:** Wes Miller; Kent Connelly, Lincoln County Commission; Mike Hunzie, WWF; Rebekah Fitzgerald, Governor's Office; Ben Wise, WGF; Mark Zornes, WGF; Brook Lee, Wyoming State Forestry; Jonathan Teichert, Lincoln County Planning; Deb Wolfley, Lincoln County Commission; Dan Oles, BLM; Neil Hymas, WGF; Randy Williams, Teton Conservation District/Biomass Group; Nancy Skinner, NPS-Fossil Butte NM; USFS – Bridger-Teton NF: Tracy Hollingshead, Lara Oles, Samuel Ainsley, Anita DeLong, Kirk Strom, Ben Banister, Eric Winthers, and Travis Bruch; and Facilitator Dave Thom, Western Wyoming RC&D.

**WELCOME/REVIEW PROCESS:** Tracy Hollingshead opened the meeting and thanked participants for attending this important step in the collaboration process. Facilitator Dave Thom reviewed the principles of collaboration and the steps of the process. The purpose of this meeting is to develop a preliminary proposed action based on the previous meeting discussions.

**EDIT AND AFFIRM COMMON THEMES:** Preliminary themes were developed at the June 23 meeting. Themes guide Forest Service staff and collaboration participants when developing treatment options. After discussion participants affirmed the following, not in priority order:

1. **Restore ecosystem function - introduce disturbance to vegetative communities**
  - Prescribed fire to stimulate aspen and shrubs and reduce fire hazard in conifers.
  - Mechanical treatments to treat dead and dying, or thin or regenerate lodgepole pine and remove conifers from aspen stands.
  - Regenerate white bark pine.
  - Conserve tall forb communities.
2. **Provide for wildlife diversity**
  - Aspen treatment
  - More forested age classes
  - Species diversity - lodgepole, aspen and whitebark.
3. **Public safety** - remove hazard trees within road corridors and recreation areas.
4. **Retain unroaded character**
  - East side of the project area
  - Close unneeded roads
  - Use existing and temporary roads to meet management objectives.
5. **Provide for economic values**
  - Utilize merchantable timber, provide firewood, investigate biomass
  - Recreation opportunities (improve scenery – aspen and remove dead trees, campsite improvement, and retain hiking and hunting opportunities)
6. **Water quality and quantity**
  - Healthy upland vegetative communities
  - Protect riparian and municipal watersheds
  - Use best management practices
  - Repair soil erosion

## **POTENTIAL TREATMENT OPTIONS:**

Tracy Hollingshead addressed several questions:

- 1) Inventoried roadless areas – policy regarding temporary roads? She could find no limit on whether temporary roads were allowed and their length in inventoried roadless areas. Temporary roads must be closed when contract operations are completed, i.e. brought back to grade and seeded. She pointed out the current Forest road inventory does not necessarily include all roads in the project area. Roads that have been closed exist in the project area and may not be included in the Forest road inventory database. Closed roads could be used and then closed again under the contract. Public use of temporary roads is complicated by contract provisions and the desire to not establish public use patterns prior to re-closure under the contract. FS would likely keep any temporary road gated to avoid public use while under contract. An analysis of roadless character will be done in the “NEPA” process.

Additional discussion about the Travel Management Plan included:

- a. Administrative use, e.g. for contract activities, may be permitted on roads closed on the Travel Map.
  - b. Changes to designated routes on the Travel Map could be recommended in this process.
- 2) Timber volume available from this project? Volume per acre will vary considerably by treatment, but could be estimated for dead lodgepole pine stands at 20 hundred cubic feet (CCF)/acre (5,000 board feet per acre) or 2 log truck loads per acre. Volume will be calculated as treatments are planned.

She then presented a map showing potential treatment areas and discussed the treatment for various map “polygons”. She also discussed the process to identify possible treatment areas as a reduction from the 74,000 acres in the project area, subtracting non-forest and unsuitable forest lands, sensitive or unstable soils, previous burns, lynx habitat, unroaded areas, etc. resulting in a pool of lands available. She reviewed lynx habitat requirements. Total management treatment in the project area is limited to about 8,000 acres for lynx requirements. About 3,600 acres need lynx surveys before they could be considered for treatment.

## **DEVELOPING A PRELIMINARY PROPOSED ACTION:**

The group discussed the following project-wide topics and also treatments identified by number shown on the work map attached.

**Unsuitable/unstable soils** (the “blue” area on the face along Hams Fork Rd): Similar slopes are being helicopter logged near Afton in the WUI and likely are Douglas-fir. FS agreed to review and consider feasibility for this project. Make it a large package for financial feasibility.

### **Biomass:**

- Chipped wood may be more valuable than sawtimber in current market. Useful for oil and gas and mineland reclamation among other purposes.
- Group agreed that biomass utilization should be evaluated for its resource utilization and financial benefits. Do consider desire to retain tree tops to facilitate prescribed burning.

### **Hazard trees:**

- Remove hazard trees in all recreation sites and along most travel routes, especially remove trees along the switch backs.
- Leave selected areas for public firewood gathering, e.g. Kelly to Big Park.
- Consider free-use “incentive” areas as needed to concentrate wood cutting to meet management objectives. In general, public firewood cutting is not effective in cleaning up areas, and can lead to unsafe hanger or partially cut trees.
- Use 300’ distances each side of road for removal to correspond with dispersed recreation opportunities under the travel plan. “2½ times tree length” is too vague.
- Leave decks of trees for wood cutters.
- Hazard tree cutting across the project area will be analyzed by the FS to provide maximum flexibility in implementation.
- FS will pursue “no effect” to lynx due to safety concerns from hazard trees, and will ensure consistency with B-T NF hazard tree strategy.



**#1 – Whitebark pine:** Group supports WBP planting. Consider the natural terrain breaks to define the areas. Access is by existing roads and “two-tracks”.

**#2 – Whitebark pine:** Group supports WBP planting. In general for WBP regeneration:

- Can use cut, pile and plant, and also understory thinning to create openings.
- May cost \$1,000/acre.
- Plant clumps and stringers to expand the effective area of the WBP project and eventual natural seeding.
- Use existing access routes.
- Important treatment for wildlife in long-term.
- Will be non-commercial – no value and high cost for WBP harvest.

**#3 and #4 – Mechanical and prescribed burn for aspen enhancement and fuel reduction:**

- Cut and burning is good for wildlife habitat. Tree tops add slash that helps the burn and stimulates aspen suckering.
- Group supports mechanical treatment followed by burning rather than only burning or only mechanical.
- Prescribed burning is included in total acres tallied for lynx disturbance.

**#5, #6, #7, #8, #9 and #10 – Aspen restoration.** Group affirmed prescribed burn.

- Will be a mosaic of species on the site which is good for wildlife diversity (a common theme). Will be small patches (like Mexico image in 1<sup>st</sup> meeting).

- Some acreage will likely drop out as a result of lynx habitat surveys.
- Do prioritize so don't hit 8,000 acre disturbance limit.
- Do make large enough patches to spread the browsing pressure.

#### **#11 – West edge along Tump Range**

- Not yet lynx habitat surveyed. Important elk/deer security cover on west side of road and Tump Ridge top. Retain some along the ridge. See map for area of concern.
- Dead lodgepole pine will be very economical to harvest due to access and quantity. Stay close to existing roads. Area includes dense forest in some areas. How wide should wildlife travel corridor be...? Use small harvest cuts to provide for wildlife travel ways.
- FS to refine the large no. of polygons in this area considering habitat and lynx surveys.
- South end is within wildland-urban interface (WUI), negating lynx habitat parameters.

#### **#12 – Prescribed burn**

- In WUI...lynx requirements different
- Group affirmed.

#### **#13 – Mechanical harvest**

- In WUI. Group affirmed treatment.
- Improve “Lara’s Road” or close it to trucks.

#### **#14 – A timber “pinch point” for livestock dispersal**

- Use timber harvest and old units to disperse sheep grazing via old clear cuts.
- Don't move sheep through burns. Vegetation needs post-burn rest.

#### **#15 – Commercial harvest**

- Group supports live tree and salvage harvest in this area. Will improve age class distribution and dispersed camping access.

#### **#16 – Large area Big Springs Rd to Big Park**

- Group supports commercial harvest as planned in this area.

#### **#17 – Big Park**

- Consider the recreation and visual values in this area
- Do hazard tree removal near outfitter camps and 2-3 trailheads
- Do improve dispersed camping by: developing campsites and removing hazard trees, do within 300' of road, manage the temporary road construction to provide access to dispersed campsites



### **South of National Forest Boundary**

- Coordinate with BLM during this project and via BLM's resource management plan revision. BLM is planning timber harvest on public lands. Should contribute to a minimum of a three-year plan desired for commercial feasibility.
- Coordination most likely during project implementation, i.e. schedule and package a contract with the BLM
- Do coordinate similarly with private landowners on south edge of Forest.

### **Tall Forb Communities**

- Project will conserve existing communities by avoiding them when possible.
- Project intent is not for wide-scale enhancement.

### **Economics/Scenery and Recreation**

- Area is high dispersed camping use.
- Treatments will improve road access making more available to the public
- Acknowledge the lower standard roads are okay and can be used by high-clearance vehicles.
- Scenery is important along main roads particularly. There will be extra mitigation, but treatment is okay.

### **Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA)**

- Most of area is within the IRA, but half the area is roaded.
- The approximate 50/50 mix of roaded and unroaded is desirable in providing "front" and "back" country recreation experiences.
- Group agreed with FS preliminary proposal to retain roadless character on east side of project area and use all transportation options on the roaded west side of the project area. FS will define the treatment areas before the August 4 meeting.
- Bridger-Teton NF will formally pursue Washington Office approval for treatment within the IRA shortly in advance of the decision (90 days). County and State plan to provide their input to the FS-WO and USDA after HFRA collaboration and before NEPA scoping.

**Mistim Creek trailhead – Way Creek** –WGF has a project and asked about packaging Hams Fork project with Mistim Ck. Answer: those project funds must be spent by September 2012 (likely before Hams Fork will be ready)

### **Wrap-up/Next Steps –**

- Forest Service will prepare a map showing treatment areas discussed above and a table or spreadsheet of treatment units and preliminary acres. They will also prepare a map or overlay of lynx habitat.
- Tracy thanked participants for their work in moving towards a proposed action. Very constructive meeting.
- Adjourned at 9:00 pm.

**Recorded by:** Anita DeLong

**Notes prepared:** Dave Thom, Facilitator, Western Wyoming Resource & Development Council



